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PARIS AND LONDON FOR AFRICA WATCHERS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/23/2019

TAGS: PGOV PINR PREF GB

SUBJECT: GABON: GOVERNMENT DISMISSED, REAPPOINTED, AND SHUFFLED

Classified By: PolOff Christopher Gunning for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

¶1. (C) On June 19 Interim President Rose Francine Rogombe accepted the constitutionally-mandated resignation of Prime Minister Jean Eyeghe Ndong and the demission of the Cabinet of Ministers. Ndong was appointed hours later to head a transitional government that looks much like its predecessor.

Most of the Ministers were reappointed to their former positions. The only significant change shifted Andre Mba Obame, a key supporter of current Minister for Defense Ali Ben Bongo who is widely believed to be a presidential candidate. Mba Obame moved from the Interior Ministry to the Ministry of National Coordination and Monitoring of Government Action, a position that will likely give him a key role in the upcoming presidential election. End Summary.

Constitutional Demands

¶2. (C) Following several days of speculation regarding the status of the Gabonese Government, Interim President Rose Francine Rogombe publicly accepted the resignation of Prime Minister Jean Eyeghe Ndong on June 19. Ndong submitted his letter of resignation on June 15, however, due to President Bongo Ondimba's funeral, Rogombe postponed announcing the acceptance of the letter and the governmental reshuffle. From the taciturn tone of his funeral eulogy on June 16, Ndong signaled his displeasure with his treatment by the ruling Gabonese Democratic Party (PDG in its French acronym) and, according to Embassy contacts, was reluctant to submit his resignation letter. Note: On June 15 the Gabonese Constitutional Court formally announced that the position of the Prime Minister must be selected by the sitting president, whether the president attains the position through an election or through an appointment.

The New Government, Much Like the Old Government

¶3. (U) Within hours of Rogombe formally accepting Ndong's resignation, he was reappointed as Prime Minister. Most key positions in the Gabonese Government remained the same -- including Minister of Defense Ali Ben Bongo, Minister of Foreign Affairs Paul Tongui, Vice Prime Minister for Environment Georgette Koko, Vice Prime Minister for Culture Paul Mba Abossole, and Vice Prime Minister for State Control Honorine Naki.

¶4. (C) The one significant portfolio change concerned Andre Mba Obame, former Minister of Interior. Mba Obame swapped portfolios with Jean Francois Ndongou, former Minister for National Coordination and Monitoring of Government Action.

Mba Obame is known as a close supporter of Defense Minister Ali Ben Bongo. According to governmental media, Mba Obame's move demonstrated an effort to increase impartiality during the election period, while also keeping him in an influential position. According to Embassy contacts, however, Mba Obame's position as Minister for National Coordination and Monitoring of Government Action will give him an important role in organizing the upcoming presidential elections.

Comment

15. (C) The resignation of the Prime Minister and the appointment of a new government were the expected next steps in the election process. However, organizing elections within the constitutionally-mandated 45 days will be a significant challenge for this government. Due to the lengthy funeral, multiple governmental holidays, and mourning period, the transitional government is only now beginning to face that challenge, nine days after the 45-day clock began ticking. The main task of the Prime Minister and the transitional government is to come up with a timetable for the elections, and we expect the timetable to require an extension of the 45-day period.

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